

How To Research Common Surname Ancestors

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Researching ancestors who had common surnames presents unique challenges to you the researcher. Add to that a common first name like John or William used by collateral families and your genealogy research can get messy in a hurry.

Before Getting Started.....

Before you get started researching deeply into your ancestor with a common name, make sure you know exactly what you already know. Not what you think you know, but what you actually know for certain.

This seems like a very basic step you likely already know, *but it's crucial*. Review what you know and know the information well.

Strategies for Researching Common Surname Ancestors

1. Learn everything you can about your earliest known ancestor.

Thoroughly research all areas of your earliest known ancestor. Re-construct his/her life year by year, month by month and day by day, if possible.

2. Create a timeline.

Creating a timeline for your ancestor with a common surname will allow you to:

- Put your ancestor in chronological time and place to better understand his/her movements and connections.
- Reveal gaps in your research where more information about your ancestor is needed.
- Become very familiar with him/her and can possibly anticipate where to find more sources of information. **But most importantly, a timeline....**

Allows you to know your ancestor so well you can distinguish them from someone else of the same name in the records.

Use this link to access a copy of the Genealogy Timeline template created in Google Docs shown in the webinar:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-ApiqIDq5Z74JW39xOpDjc6zNeqGF-yRigUC5oKs1os/edit?usp=sharing>

3. Research your ancestor's community.

Who lived close? Who appears as witnesses, neighbors, etc in your ancestor's will, estate records, deeds, etc. **Whose records did your ancestor appear in?** These are people your ancestors would have been doing business with or even related to.

Research their connection to your ancestor.

4. Utilize DNA Testing

Paper genealogy and DNA testing go hand in hand. It is difficult to solve tricky relationships without both. Consultation with a genetic genealogist can be beneficial if you are not familiar with the DNA concepts.

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